OMBUDS OFFICE

Promoting fairness at Concordia

ANNUAL REPORT 2016–17

OMBUDS OFFICE

July 7, 2017

Members of the Board of Governors
Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West
Montreal, QC
H3G 1M8

To the Board of Governors;

As per article 29 of the Terms of Reference of the Ombuds Office, I am pleased to submit the **2016-2017 Annual Report of the Ombuds Office: Promoting Fairness at Concordia University**.

The purpose of this report is to provide you with:

- an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the Ombuds office;
- a description of the year's activities from May 1, 2016 to April 30, 2017;
- key statistics regarding the community we serve;
- some examples of recommendations offered; and
- plans for the upcoming year.

I look forward to presenting this report to you in person.

Sincerely,

amy fish

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Ombuds Office Overview

Concordia University was one of the first Universities in Canada to establish an Ombuds Office. The office was founded in 1978, on the principles of impartiality, confidentiality, independence and accessibility.

The Ombuds Office reports directly to the Board of Governors to maintain its independent status.

The Ombudsperson is responsible for promoting fairness in the University.

This objective is achieved through:

- consulting with students, faculty and staff to prevent conflict;
- investigating potential complaints and/or allegations of unfairness;
- recommending improvements to policies and procedures where appropriate;
- developing materials to assist community members in conflict de-escalation; and
- offering workshops to groups requesting assistance in resolving conflict related issues.

Ombuds Office 2016-2017

This year was stable in terms of staffing, budget and mandate. No major changes took place.

Highlights of 2016-2017

Slight Decrease in Files

This year, the Ombuds Office treated 470 files, as compared to 514 the previous year.

Very few of these files became formal or serious complaints.

For the past five years, the number of files has hovered around 500. This is exactly what would be expected in a university of our size. Generally, the volume of Ombuds files is expected to be approximately 1% of the student population. When you consider that our office also accepts files from faculty and staff, we are well within and even below the industry standard.

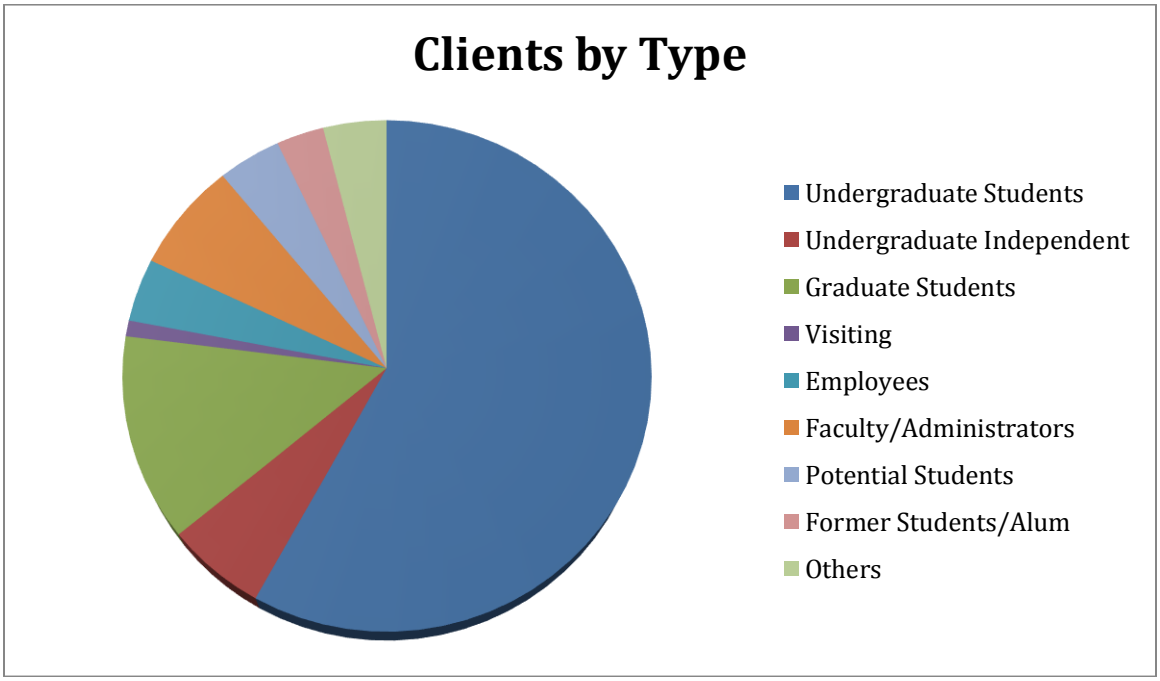
The decrease this year may be explained by a correction of the minor increase experienced last year with the advent of a new Ombudsperson.

This slight decrease does not appear to represent any significant change in the accessibility and/or the practice of the Ombuds office.

Client Overview

470 concerns were brought to the Ombuds Office this year, most of which came from students. Please see Chart A, below for a breakdown of what type of clients came to our office.

Chart A: Percentage of Clients by Type



Overall:

- Almost no change since last year;
- 78% of the concerns were brought forward by students;
- 11% came from faculty members or staff; and
- 11% came from other parties (e.g, alumni, potential students).

The 11% from "other" parties was expected to decline this year, however it grew by 1%. The Ombuds Office Terms of Reference (TOR) set guidelines for who is considered a community member, but do allow for exceptions based on the Ombudsperson's discretion. This year, several files were treated from potential students (who had applied but not been accepted) as well as alumni with extenuating circumstances.

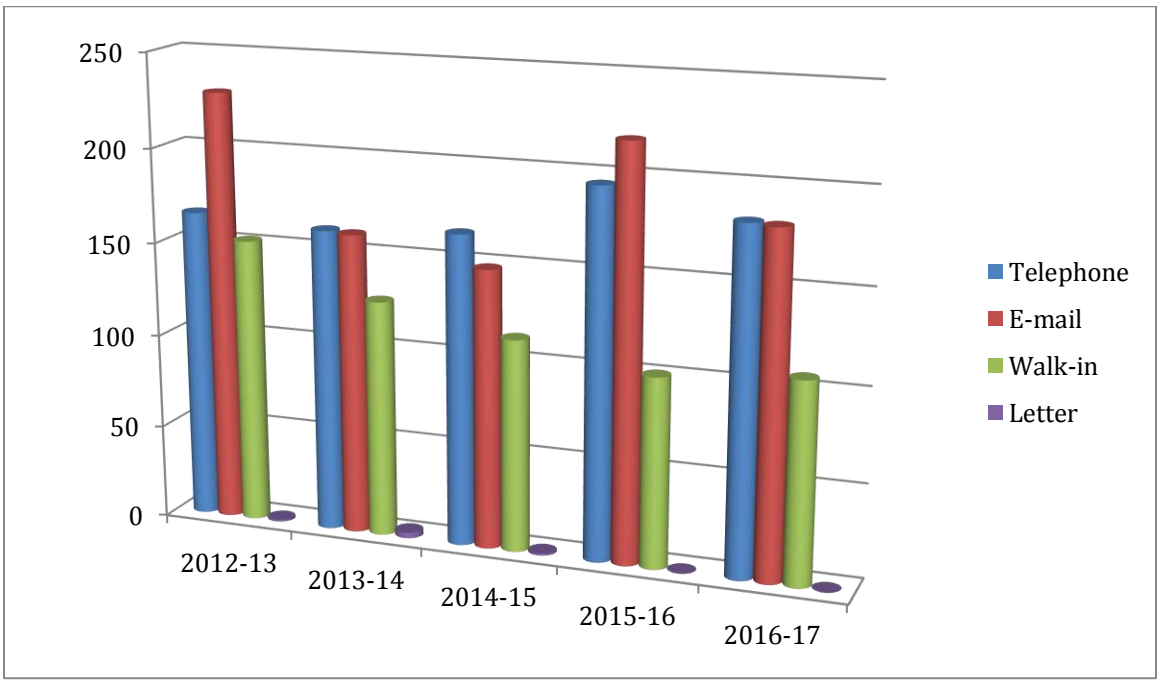
In 2017-2018, there will be a review of the TOR, and the definitions in this category will be clarified.

Parents were not classified separately this year, because they are only allowed to bring forward an issue with the express written consent of their child (who is a student). Therefore any parental concern is considered a student concern, and is classified by type of student.

Means of Initial Contact

The Ombuds Office receives complaints and concerns through telephone calls, e-mails and walk-ins. We conducted an analysis of the past five years to see if there were any major changes in this area. Please see findings below, in Chart B:

Chart B: Means of Initial Contact by Year



This chart represents only the first point of contact. Once the clients reach out to us, we schedule a follow up in person or over the phone, depending upon both their preference and the nature of the issue. Clients that walk-in are seen immediately whenever possible, or given a follow up meeting within the next few days.

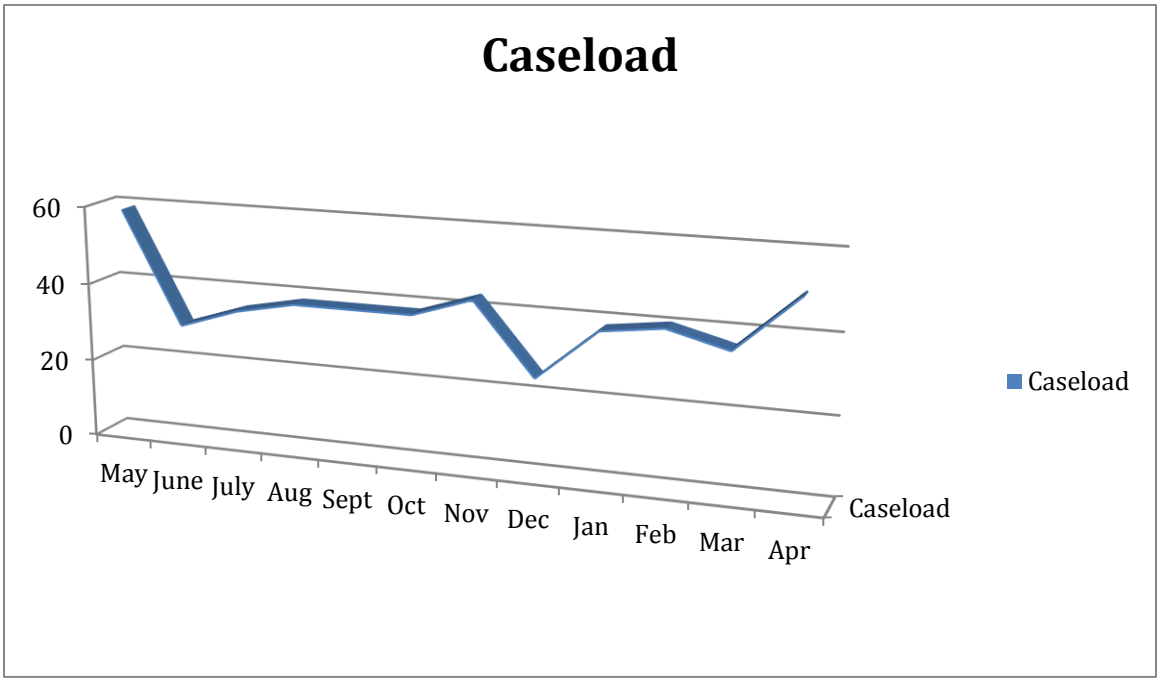
Although, walk-ins appeared to be trending downwards, this year they appear to be on a slight upswing. It is our hope that clients will continue to come directly to our office so that we can provide assistance as early in the process as possible.

With the exception of 2012-13, e-mail and telephone have been very close, with this year bringing only 1% variance between them. For the past five years, phone and e-mail have been the most common methods of communication, with walk-ins third, and letters only rarely.

Caseload per Month

Chart C, below shows a month by month breakdown of our caseload. As expected, some times of the year are significantly busier thank others.

Chart C: Caseload by Month (2016-2017)



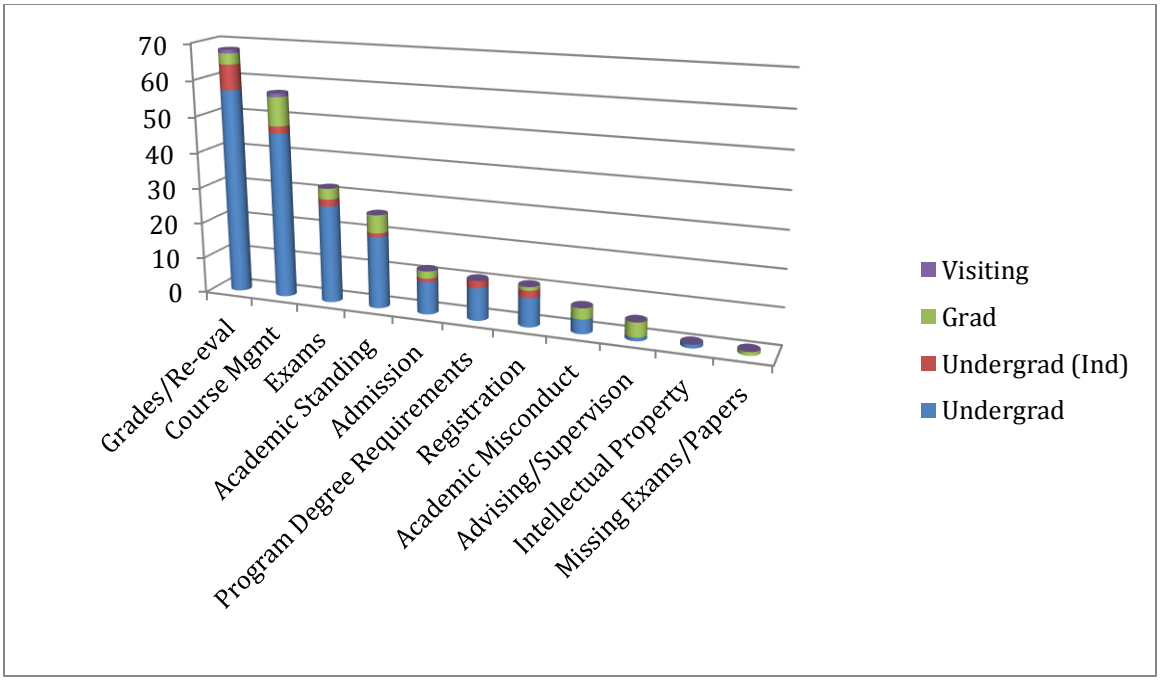
As would be expected, our highest volume months were April and May because of issues with graduation, final exams and program degree requirements. December was the quietest this year.

Student Concerns

Students bring a wide variety of concerns to our office. We separate the concerns into academic and non-academic issues. A full breakdown of academic concerns is presented in Chart D, below.

Student Academic Concerns

Chart D: Student Academic Concerns by Type (2016-17)

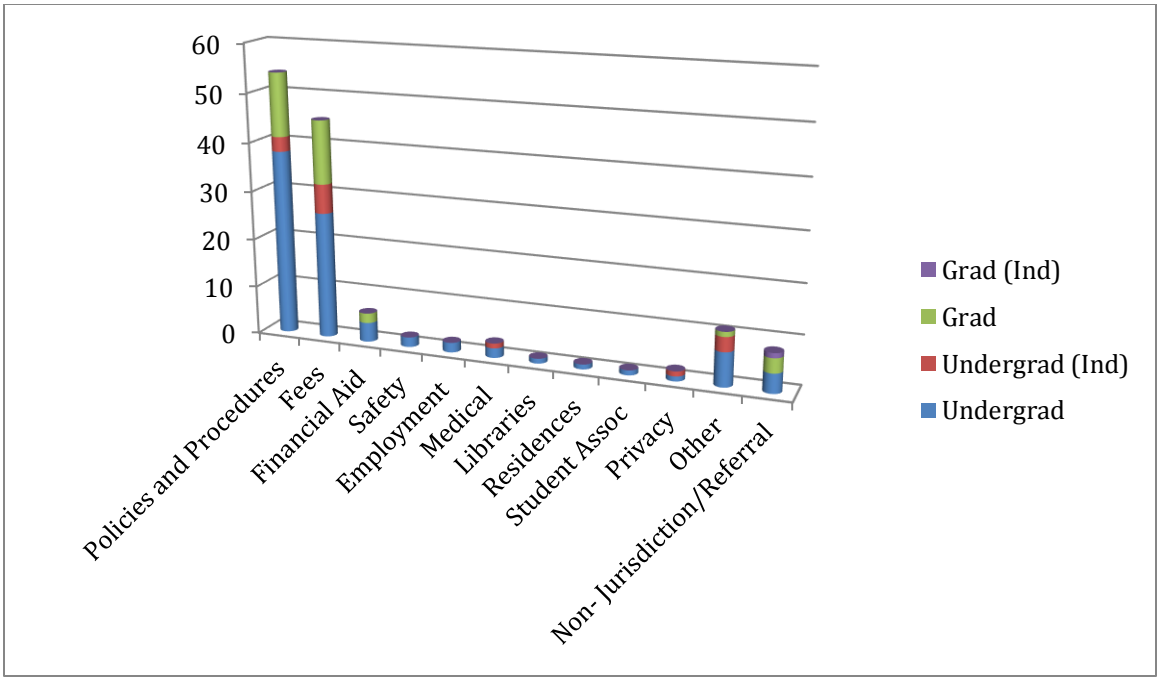


Similar to last year, Grades and Course Management represent the largest percentage of Student Academic concerns. This category includes any dispute regarding course requirements, unfair grading practices, applications for re-evaluation and/or grading policies in the classroom. Because these two categories represent over 20% of our concerns, next year they will be broken down even further. We have developed new categories for data collection for 2017-2018 that will illustrate the nature of our work in greater detail.

Different from last year, Exams are third in terms of Student Concerns, and Academic Standing is fourth. Program Degree Requirements and Registration became less of a concern this year. This may be because of continuous improvement in the area of the Student Information Service, and because of increased effort in communicating with students regarding requirements for graduation.

Student Non-Academic Concerns

Chart E: Student Non-Academic Concerns by Type (2016-2017)



The majority of non-academic concerns relate to Policies and Procedures and Fees. These complaints range from questions regarding when a student can write a supplemental exam to how a student who changes programs is billed. To better illustrate the detail of these issues, the categories will be broken down further in 2017-2018.

All other categories are very small and represent between one and five files. For example, there may be a question regarding whether a student can bring his or her child to the library which would fall under the category of Libraries. A student may call regarding a complex issue, which, once we begin to investigate, is determined to be outside of the jurisdiction of the Ombuds Office, and that client would then be referred to the appropriate department to assist them.

Resolutions of Student Cases

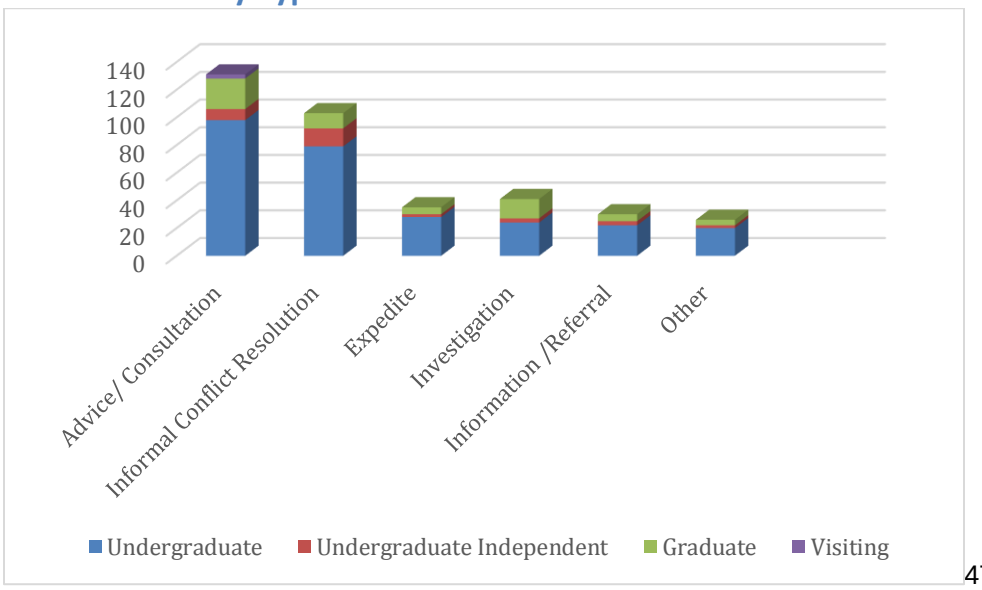
Depending upon the nature of the file brought to our office, we may use one of several techniques to provide assistance. For example, we might:

- Provide information and/or referral to a more appropriate resource;
- Offer coaching and/or advice;
- Assist with informal conflict resolution such as mediation; or
- Follow up on an issue and expedite where possible.

In some cases, following our initial consultation, the client may decide not to proceed with an investigation. Other times, the issue may resolve itself independent of the Ombuds Office's efforts. Both of these would fall under the category of "Withdrawn".

Please see Chart F, below for the breakdown of actions taken in student cases by type of student 2016-17,

Chart F: Actions Taken in Student Cases by Type of Student 2016-17



470

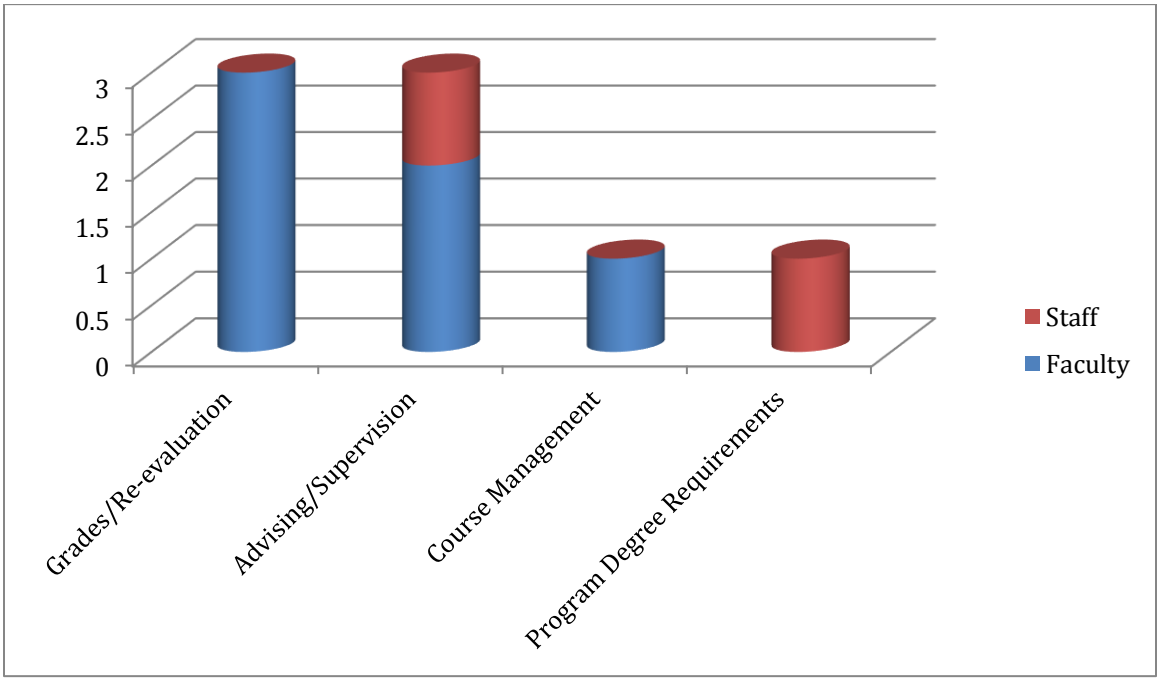
Since last year, the Ombuds Office has changed the categorization of Actions Taken to better break down the types of assistance that we provide. Specifically, the former category of Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction has been reclassified into three categories:

- Advice/Consultation;
- Information/Referral; and
- Withdrawn

This year, 22 files were Withdrawn before completion. The most common reason for this is that the situation resolved itself on its own without Ombuds intervention. The second reason is that the client decided not to proceed because they felt that the situation was no longer relevant (e.g., they graduated or completed the course and decided not to pursue their earlier concern). Finally, in fewer than five cases, the reason for the withdrawal was not given to the Ombuds Office.

Faculty and Staff Concerns

Academic Concerns



Faculty and Staff concerns represent approximately 10% of the files brought forward this year. These represent both academic and non-academic issues. Interestingly, no academic issues were brought to our attention by the Academic Administration this past year.

Academic Concerns

There were 8 academic concerns brought forward this year which are broken down as follows:

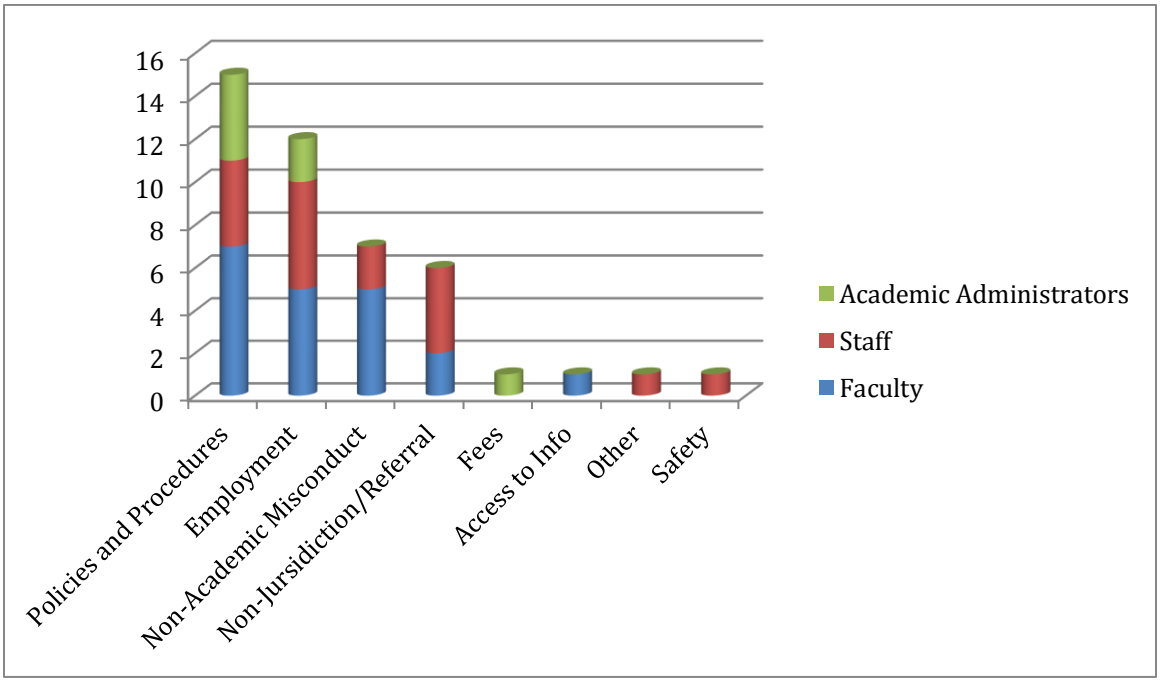
- Advising/Supervision: 3
- Grade Re-evaluation: 3
- Course Management: 1 and
- Program/Degree Requirements: 1.

Because the numbers are so small, an analysis of the type of client was not relevant and therefore will not be part of this report.

Non-Academic Concerns

The remaining 44 files relate to a variety of concerns as presented in Chart G, below.

Chart G: Faculty/Staff Non-Academic Concerns 2016-17



Here too, the numbers are very small. Policies and procedures are the biggest category with 15 files, followed by employment and misconduct.

There was one file regarding fees, one regarding access to information, and one regarding safety and security.

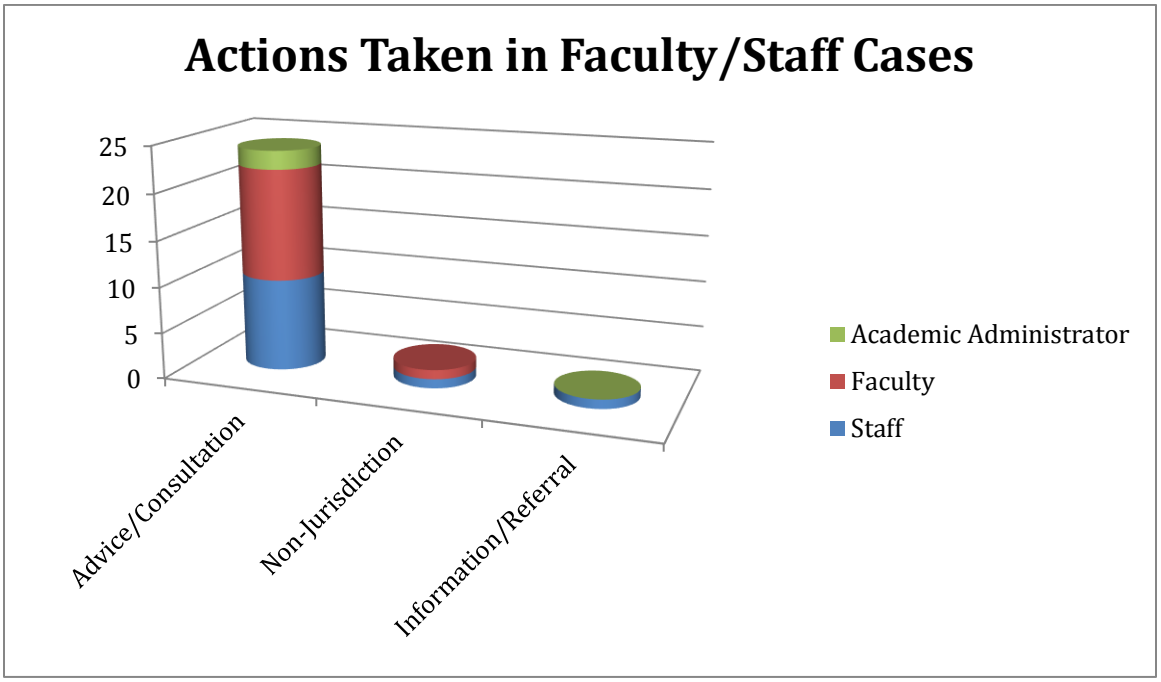
Six files were judged to be outside of the jurisdiction of the Ombuds Office and the clients were referred to a more appropriate office.

It is our goal to encourage faculty and staff to continue to consult with our office regarding concerns or challenging situations. Our intention is to continue to improve communication and to prevent the escalation of complaints at Concordia University.

Resolutions of Faculty and Staff Cases.

Chart H, below shows the actions taken in faculty/staff cases 2016-2017.

Chart H: Actions Taken by Type for Faculty/Staff Cases 2016-2017



Here, too, the main function of the Ombuds Office is to offer advice and consultation. Two files were judged to be outside of the Ombuds jurisdiction, and those clients were referred to the appropriate resource. In one case, the client requested information from us.

Review of Prior Recommendations

No formal recommendations were made in 2015-2016.

Examples of Recommendations and Assistance Provided for 2016-2017

Over the course of this year, the Ombuds Office has assisted many clients with their concerns. Some examples are as follows, with a few details changed to preserve confidentiality:

- A student contacted us regarding a quiz that was given in class and in her opinion, was graded incorrectly. The Chair investigated and determined that there was an error. Everyone in the class received five marks for the quiz. We recommended to the Chair that she provide additional assistance to the professor who appeared to be having some difficulties grading the quizzes and tests in the class.

- A former student contacted us more than twenty years after he left Concordia University. He wanted one of his grades to be taken off of his transcript. Upon further examination of the file, this student had never applied for a DISC (or to have this course removed). We recommended that he complete the appropriate paperwork, including as much detail as possible regarding his particular situation.

- A Professor contacted us because a student was contesting the grading scheme for the exam. We reviewed the Course Outline and determined that the Professor was not doing anything to contradict what had previously been agreed upon. We recommended to the Professor to continue grading as deemed appropriate as we saw no violation of any Concordia University policy.